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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 000015

SIPDIS

STATE FOR G/TIP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/03/2015

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SUBJECT: MIGRANT WORKERS' RIGHTS NGO APPROVED BY GOB

REF: MANAMA 1503

Classified By: DCM Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (U) The GOB gave the Migrant Workers Protection Society permission to operate December 29. The Society, which provides support to abused expatriate housemaids and laborers, replaces the Migrant Workers Group (MWG), part of the dissolved Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR). Following the BCHR's closure in September for alleged violations of the 1989 Societies Law (reftel), Migrant Workers Group members applied for registration as an independent organization under the new name. While waiting for official approval from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA), the MWG's volunteers continued their activities (including physically rescuing abused housemaids from their employers) without government interference.

2. (C) The Society will focus on preventing abuse; resolving differences between employers and migrant laborers; counseling and rehabilitating victims; and supporting legislation to protect workers' rights. Society board members also said they would open a shelter for abused migrant workers. Last year the GOB promised to help the MWG in this effort and named a site for the shelter. According to MOLSA Director of Labor Relations Sheikh Ali Al Khalifa, preparations are complete and the shelter lacks only the GOB's approval to begin providing services. Sheikh Ali expects approval in the coming months.

3. (C) Comment: The GOB's registration of the Migrant Workers Protection Society demonstrates recognition within some quarters of the government that the BCHR contributed positively to society in certain areas, even sensitive ones such as the mistreatment of foreign workers. Unfortunately, this recognition is not spilling over into broader acceptance of the BCHR; a court case filed by the BCHR demanding the re-opening of the center is still in the courts, and former members despair that it may really be closed permanently. We continue to advocate for the re-opening of the center, and await resumption of the court case on January 16.

MONROE